DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 073 963 SO 005 371

AUTHOR Fox, Thomas E.
TITLE Using Evaluative Assertion Analysis for Social Studies Research.
PUB DATE Nov 72
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the National Council for the Social Studies, Boston, Massachusetts, November, 1972

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Bibliographic Citations; *Content Analysis; Curriculum Research; Evaluation Techniques; *Political Socialization; Social Problems; *Social Studies; Textbook Content; *Textbook Evaluation; Textbook Research; Textbooks

ABSTRACT

There has been increasing pressure in recent years for a more realistic portrayal of societal complexities and problems in elementary and secondary social studies materials--especially textbooks. The author discusses in this paper a research project in which a large sample of social studies texts in wide use in grades three, five, and seven are evaluated. Emphasis is placed on description and evaluation of the ways in which social conflict associated with racial, economic, political, and ecological policies are presented to the young reader. Evaluative assertion analysis, a content analysis research technique, is used to extract from a message the evaluations being made of significant concepts. This technique is briefly described and the author illustrates the assumptions involved in the application of evaluative assertation analysis. (Author/SHM)

FILMED FROM BEST AVAILABLE COPY

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED 073963

SO 005 371

Using Evaluative Assertion Analysis for Social Studies Research

Prepared for the Annual Meeting of the
National Council for the Social Studies
Boston, Massachusetts
November 1972

by

Thomas E. Fox
Assistant Professor
Education Department
Skidmore College
Saratoga Springs, New York 12866

Wirt and Kirst tell us in their new book, THE POLITICAL WEB OF AMERICAN SCHOOLS (1), that the tie between the school and the political system is reciprocal, and that the myth of the apolitical school is one that stands in the way of understanding the nature of this relationship.

That schools are "political institutions" comes as no surprise to you, I am sure. Most informed citizens and educators quickly learn that educational decision-making is a type of political behavior.

Of course some educators learn more slowly than others. Take Jonathan Kozol's now famous firing from the Boston Public Schools for example. You probably remember from his book, DEATH AT AN EARLY AGE (2), that Kozol read poems to his Black students by Langston Hughes that were not on the district's "approved list." He also read "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" by Robert Frost to the same children. It's not that this latter poem is especially political -- it happens to be on the "sixth grade list" and Kozol was teaching fourth graders. According to Kozol, he was fired for engaging in the political act of "curriculum deviation."

What happens when the curriculum deviates and the teacher doesn't? Irving Horowitz examined introductory sociology textbooks used in American colleges since the turn of the century and concluded that even social science taught on the college level is influenced by the vicissitudes of American politics. According to Horowitz, such compendiums mirror the ideology of the period in which they are written rather than any fundamental continuities in social science. He hastened to add, however, that his observation "...is not intended to discredit the idea of sociology as a science, only to credit the idea of sociology as an ideology." (3, p 51)

I doubt if Horowitz's findings and conclusions are any more surprising

than those of Wirt and Kirst. After all, revisionism is the stock and trade of graduate courses in historiography, and where would the "new social studies" be without the concepts of mind-set and frame of reference?

In recent years there has been increasing pressure for elementary and secondary social studies materials -- especially textooks --for a more realistic portrayal of the complexities and problems that exist in our society. The persistent attention to the way racial and ethnic minorities are presented in textbooks has brought about more realistic and favorable treatments of these groups. Lately the spokeswomen for the Women's Liberation Movement have taken up the fight for better treatment in textbooks.

The very first issue of a new journal called WOMEN: A JOURNAL OF LIBERATION (4) devoted two articles to the ways textbooks "channel" and stifle the personalities of young girls. Even Gloria Steinem saw fit to comment on textbooks in a new book she co-authored with the female psychologist Phyllis Chester. Their book is about that famcus comic-book heroine "Wonder Woman," and according to Ms. Steinem,

> "If we had all read more about Wonder Woman
> and less about Dick and Jane, the new wave
> of the feminist revolution might have
> happened less painfully and sooner." (5)

In the hope of putting "Dick and Jane" to rest for good let me turn to one more hero of the comics called Doonesbury. The cartoonist who creates "Doonesbury" is a student at Yale who has no doubt read his share of textbooks. In one of his comic strips we see a white college student named Michael entering the home of a Black family named Jackson to help their young son Rufus with his homework. The dialogue went as follows:

> "Hi, you little rascal." (says Michael)
>
> "Hi, you gross baboon." (Rufus replies)

"O.K., Let's get going." (says Michael)
"See Jane run, Dick, see her..." (reads Rufus)
(Rufus pauses, then says)
"Man, I MUST protest! I can't read this trash!
Dick and Jane are IMPOSSIBLE to relate to...
Dick and Jane aren't helping me come to grips with a
sense of selfworth. This is very important for me
as a little kid growing up in the ghetto.
As professor Kenneth Clark once wrote: 'Black
children who are consistently rejected understandably
begin to question whether they deserve no more respect
from the larger society.'
I think in the light of all this, I should knock off
for the day and go outside and reassert by Black
identity."
(Rufus sits back and smiles broadly at Michael.)
(Michael sits stony-faced then says,)
"Nice try, Sweetheart."
"Go, Spot you crazy dog, go!" (reads Rufus (6)

I recently completed a research project in which I examined a large sample of social studies textbooks being used across the country in grades three, five and nine, and while I found almost no examples of the lil y-white well-scrubbed Dick and Jane books of the past I did find a consensus oriented, conflict free -- model of society dominating virtually every text.

Time doesn't permit me to discuss all the literature that convinced me that textbooks should help children to understand and deal with social conflict. Let me simply say that there is a growing body of research that indicates that

children form basic political attitudes early in their elementary school years -- if not before -- and that social studies education can do very little to change stereotypic thinking or basic political attitudes at the high school level. At the same time cumulative research indicates that many young Americans neither understand or support our basic constitutional liberties. I feel I must also add, however, that recent research done by Zellamn and Sears indicates that both political knowledge and attitudes -- such as acceptance of political conflict and tolerance for civil liberties -- can be increased by exposing young students to a more sophisticated view of social conflict. With this in mind I set out to determine how well currently used textbooks are contributing to that effort.

Since schools in all societies are charged with promoting national loyalties it should not be surprising that they present a positive image of their country. Therefore when I analyzed social studies textbooks it was the socialization messages that deal with social defects and problems that were of special interest to me. In particular I choose to describe and evaluate the ways in which social conflict associated with racial, economic, political and ecological policies and practices are presented to the young reader.

For such research I needed an evaluative instrument that enabled me to do more than count the number of times social conflict appears in the texts I analyzed. Since there are no external measures to rate textual treatment of social conflict, the fact that I found only 1%, 3% and 2% of the content mentioning social conflict in texts for grades three, five and nine respectively didn't really tell me very much. In short, "How much social conflict is enough?" is essentially a political question.

To avoid relying on my subjective judgment I used a content analysis technique called evaluative assertion analysis. Content analysis, which has been widely

used in communication research, is defined as "a phase of information-processing in which communication content is transformed, through objective systematic application of categorization rules into data that can be summarized and compared." (7)

Evaluative assertion analysis is a special type of content analysis that enables you to extract from a message the evaluations being made of significant concepts. I think it is especially useful for analyzing curriculum materials because it involves a minimum dependence on the effects of the message on receivers -- something you can rarely determine anyway -- or on the existing attitudes of coders -- a variable that can wreck havoc with your reliability coefficients.

Evaluative assertion analysis "derives from the combined application of a congruity principle of attitude formation and change . . . and certain principles of linguistic analysis." (8) It begins with a sample of "raw" messages as received from some source -- a description of Martin Luther King's march on Selma for example -- and ends up with an evaluative scaling of attitude objects as used in these messages -- such as the attitude of the author toward the march as indicated by the language he used to describe it. (8, p. 47)

Briefly, the technique enables the evaluation of an evaluative assertion through the connection of an evaluative term of variable direction and intensity (good, bad, neglected, loved) to a subject (President Nixon, policeman, duties) by means of a connector of varying direction and intensity (is, is not, may be). To determine the evaluations of a subject in a text, all the evaluative assertions are extracted from the text and converted into subject-verb-complements.

The application of evaluative assertion analysis involves certain assumptions, but ones I think most dissertation committees can live with. I'll list these assumptions to illustrate how the technique works.

1. "That attitude objects in messages can be distinguished from common meaning materials by reasonably sophisticated users of English." (8, p 47)
   (For example, ATROCITY is bad whereas people of GOOD WILL is something favorable.)

2. "That reasonably sophisticated users of English can make reliable and valid judgments as to when two alternative constructions are equivalent or non-equivalent in meaning." (8, p 47)
   (For example, coders can judge whether or not (a) VIET CONG TERRORISTS/ are denounced by/ people of GOOD WILL and (b) VIET CONG are aggressors/ together constitute an adequate and sufficient translation of the evaluative significance of (c) "People of good will denounce these Viet Cong terrorists.")

3. "That reasonably sophisticated users of English can agree to a satisfactory degree on the direction and intensity of assertions." (8, p 48)
   (We assume that coders will agree that /X/ are denounced by /Y/ is a negative assertion of considerable intensity while /X/ may have been /Y/ is a positive assertion of weak intensity.)

4. "That reasonably sophisticated users of English can agree on the direction and degree of evaluativeness of common meaning terms. (8, p 48)
   For example, /X/ is/ a news item/ has zero evaluativeness, that /X/ is/ a fabricator/ is quite negative in evaluation, that /X/ is accepted by/ millions of people of good will/ is extremely positive in evaluation, and so forth.

Gross tells us in a recent review of doctoral research done over the past decade that a plethora of textbook studies have been done, and that what we need now are improved evaluative instruments to produce significant finding in this area. (9) I think content analysis techniques like the one I have briefly described here, and related instruments such as Pratt's "evaluative coefficient analysis" (10) can be used to produce such findings.

Content analysis can't tell you which political ideology to side with, but it can help you identify the political assertions contained in curriculum materials so you can pay your money and take your pick.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND NOTES

1. Frederick M. Wirt and Michael W. Kirst. THE POLITICAL WEB OF AMERICAN SCHOOLS. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1972.

2. Jonathan Kozol. DEATH AT AN EARLY AGE. New York: Bantam Books, 1968

3. Irving Louis Horowitz. "The sociology textbook: The treatment of conflict in American sociological literature," SOCIAL SCIENCE INFORMATION. 1972, 11 (1), pp. 51-63.

4. Jamie Kelem Frisof. "Textbooks and channeling," WOMEN: A JOURNAL OF LIBERATION, Vol. 1, No. 1, Fall, 1969, pp. 26-28. (Also) Leah Heyn. "Children's books," pp. 22-25.

5. Gloria Steinem and Dr. Phyllis Chesler, WONDER WOMAN. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1972.

6. G. B. Trudeau. "Doonesbury," SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE. (Sunday Punch) November 25, 1972.

7. Ole R. Holsti. CONTENT ANALYSIS FOR THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES, Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1969.

8. Charles E. Osgood, Sol Saporta and Jim C. Nunnally. "Evaluative assertion analysis," LITERA, 3, 1953, pp. 47-102.

9. Richard E. Gross. "A decade of doctoral research in social studies education," SOCIAL EDUCATION, (May 1972), Vol. 36, No. 5., pp. 555-560.

10. David Pratt. "Value judgments in textbooks: The coefficient of evaluation as a quantitative measure," INTERCHANGE, Vol. 2, No. 3, 1971, pp. 1-14.